COMPUTER TRAINING:
HOW TO TRAIN THE COMPUTER PHOBIC
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Resistance and Fear

Why are people afraid of using computers? There are many reasons why people are afraid of using computers, ranging from not knowing how to type to the fear that they will be replaced. As technology moves in the direction towards automation, people are very much concerned about their own positions being taken over by computers.

You and I know, just by working in computers, that the previous statement is just not true! How many times have we discovered that by freeing the people we teach from the every day manual repetition, it leaves those people more time for creativity in their jobs? Over and over I have encountered the resistance to using computers caused by the notion that saving time will reduce the amount of work to be done. This time savings translates into direct labor savings from management's perspective, which has the support staff fearing for their jobs.

For example, I have seen a group of secretaries very upset because management had said that by using computers, the secretarial staff would be cut. Each one of the secretaries was concerned about losing her job. Overcoming their resistance to training was very difficult. If the directive to learn to use computers comes from management with the assurance that jobs will be enhanced, not eliminated, the employees will be excited, not fearful for their future.

Many people are afraid to admit that they don't know how to type. In this case, I like to give them a lot of encouragement to learn to type. There are good typing tutorials for PC's on the market. As time goes by, more and more software is function key or window driven and the need to be a skilled keyboard user is diminishing. But, learning is more difficult for the person who is trying to learn how to use computers and to figure out where the keys are at the same time.

Motivation

Working with the training staff, management must sell the benefits of training. Adult learners need to be assured of a positive learning experience. They need to be motivated through measures which include the emphasis for new opportunities. Once adults are convinced of the benefits of learning, the barriers of resistance will come tumbling down. This must be a concentrated effort between management and trainers.

One method I found very beneficial to people who are going to be learning about a system is to demonstrate it in a non-threatening environment, such as a departmental meeting. To "sell" the system and its benefits before training is very important. By presenting the system a step at a time, everyone's comfort zone is preserved.

In one company, I had to train 20 managers and 40 secretaries. They either had no or very little knowledge of computers. I was implementing a variety of programs on PC's as well as on the HP3000, so I had a challenge ahead of me. Initially, I met with each of the managers and their secretaries to get input from them as to what they'd like to use their computers for. After we selected the hardware and software, I held demonstrations for the groups, one for the managers and one for the secretaries. I showed them what they were getting and allowed them time to sit down at the machines and play. I also included some games and encouraged each of them to play the games. The company was a real estate firm, so I gave them copies of Real Estate Baron and Type Attack. They had a great time playing the games and even had some competition among themselves. It was fun to see the managers teasing the president as he lost his money. Later they had their real training sessions. From this initial fun session they felt comfortable with at least the basics of using the computer before they began getting down to business.

In another company, we had installed their HP3000 just before Christmas. At the annual department Christmas party we had everyone play the games in GAMES.SYS such as Blackjack and Othello. Again, everyone had fun while learning the basics.

While you are making the training fun, you cannot lose sight of the objectives. That objective is to teach them to become comfortable (and thereby, productive) using computers in their jobs.

Teaching Methods and Tools

1. Class Environment

    The class environment is very important, especially for
    the beginner. If the student is uncomfortable, then
    his/her span of attention is short. Do you want
    everyone jumping up for coffee every 15 minutes? Do
    start with something good to eat, (it does help) but if
    the room is crowded and stuffy, everyone will either be
    asleep or leaving all the time.

    The size of class depends on whether or not you want to
    be a neurotic at the end of the session. The best (and
    therefore, most expensive) way to teach is individually.
    This way you know that you have their attention and they
    also have yours. I have taught a number of high-level
    management people this way. You have to adjust your
    teaching style to their learning style. Some will allow
    you to teach as though you were in a classroom. Others
    have told me to teach them exactly what they want to
    know and not anything else! I call this speed-teaching,
    something akin to speed-reading. It is good for getting
    the general idea, but not good for details. These
    people will usually be back for more.

    The more commonly used method for teaching is in small
    groups. Each student can have his/her own terminal or
    have two students share the terminal, but no more than
    two per terminal. The advantage to having each student
    having his/her own terminal is that they have much more
    time for hands-on training during class. But if two
    people are sharing the terminal, they can help each
    other along and reinforce the lessons. I have no
    preference for either way. I usually have no more than
    4 terminals at one time, for up to 8 people. Any more
    than that and the class goes too slow.

2. Team Teaching

    Whenever possible, have a user be a part of the training
    team. At the real estate firm, there were two of us who
    taught the classes. I taught the technical parts, and
    the other person from the user area taught the
    application parts. We blended well with each other and
    monitored the progress of the students by monitoring
    each other. She called herself the "dummy". For the
    first few times we taught, she'd make me explain in more
    simpler terms if I became too technical. She drew upon
    the group's experiences to relate back to what was being
    taught.

Be sure to use plain English and define **ALL** terms. One
helpful hint is to label all the parts of the equipment
and have a picture to give them, with, of course, all
the parts labeled.

3. Start at the Very Beginning

    If the user is being trained on a terminal or PC
    attached to the HP3000, give them a tour of the computer
    room. Again, have labels on the equipment in the
    computer room. Once a user understands that they are a
    part of the big picture, they can understand what goes
    on in the "big black hole" called the computer room.

4. Teach One Thing at a Time

    Give the students outlines and quick reference guides at
    the beginning of class. While teaching them, refer to
    the outline and the quick reference guide often. Even
    though you may have a reference book to give them, DON'T
    teach from that book.

    Apply the K.I.S.S. (Keep It Simple, Stupid) method to
    teaching. Have the student perform only one function at
    a time making sure you clearly define the end result. A
    step-by-step approach is a must. If you have the
    students doing multiple tasks, you will only confuse
    them.

    Also, if there is more than one way to do something,
    only show them one way at first. Once they have
    mastered the first way, then show them the other ways or
    the shortcuts. For example, if you teach a product like
    HPDESK, there are many ways to move around the desk.
    ONLY show them how to move around the desk by using the
    function keys. Then, after they are used to the
    function keys, have them move around the desk by using
    the numbers.

5. HELP-HELP-HELP

    Most software comes with a "help" facility. As a part
    of class, emphasize the use of "help". Practice going
    into and out of the help screens so they can become
    comfortable with using the feature. This way, after
    class, they can become self-sufficient.

    Give the students names of people who work around them
    who also know the software. Many users like being
    resident experts as long as it doesn't start being the
    primary part of their job.

At Kaiser, we have given out a brochure to all users of PC's and Office Automation software describing the Technical Support Services that we provide. One service we have implemented is a "HELP LINE" phone number. This number, along with a system ID, is attached to everyone's equipment. The "HELP LINE" is always staffed during working hours and everyone can get their questions answered immediately. We document the questions and can tell if a person needs further training in specific areas (or if the initial training didn't take). Not only do we answer questions, but we provide the personal attention neophyte users often need.

After the Class -- FOLLOW UP

It is very hard to have an effective training program without providing follow up on the training. I tell the students to go back to their offices and take time to go through the class exercises again and just practice. I also tell managers that they **MUST** allow their employees time to practice before giving them real work to do.

To get people started using Electronic Mail, I wrote messages to people to get them to write messages back to me. We scheduled training classes through Electronic Mail. I also encouraged everyone to write messages to each other. One manager was complaining he didn't get any Electronic Mail. When the other managers heard this, they started sending him messages just so he wouldn't feel left out. Try to find a champion among the users and this person will do more for spreading enthusiasm for using the system than all the Data Processing people combined.

A very good source for additional training after the class is the on-line tutorials that come with most software. I'm impressed by the quality of some on-line tutorials I've seen. Several years ago, there was no such thing. It's wonderful that software companies are realizing people need more than reference books! I particularly like the "learndesk" feature of HPDESK. If time is at a premium, or if you can't hold a formal class, the on-line tutorials can be substituted for classroom training.

Conclusion

I have been training people how to use computers for many years and I still learn new techniques daily. I find that making learning fun and non-threatening goes a long way in making a training program a success. When you see a person who has never used a computer become one of the most excited computer users around, it is worth all the effort!